

A JOHNSONIAN NEWS LETTER

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Edited by James L. Clifford
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa.

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A December issue obviously calls for some mention of the approaching season -- formerly one of pleasant relaxation, with at least two weeks of holidays, and the chance to see distant friends at the M.L.A. meetings. This year there will be no M.L.A., for many of us no vacation except Christmas day, and consequently little relaxation. But we wish you all a very Merry Christmas anyway, and the happiest of New Years. May 1944 be a better year than 1943!

While we are on the subject of the changed conditions prevailing on most of our college campuses, we can't resist quoting a delightful sentence from Lawrence Wroth's 1943 Report of the John Carter Brown Library. "The graduate student has virtually disappeared, and the professor who in other days had time for leisurely studies must now scurry, there is no other word for it, from lecture room to study hall and from consultation to committee meeting, striving in his progress across the campus to avoid falling beneath the feet of young men marching hither and yon to rhythmic chants about the maiden left behind bedecked with yellow ribbons or the anonymous someone who lives in the kitchen with Dinah, strumming on his old banjo." University life marches on!

We hope you weren't shocked by the rather ostentatious return address on our new envelopes. Frankly, we were. When the package came back from the printers the letters seemed twice as high as we had expected. But in war time, with the paper shortage, we must use them and suffer, though not in silence.

THE 1753 GENT. MAG. INDEX

In the 1942 volume of Essays and Studies by Members of the English Ass'n, this year collected by R.W. Chapman, there is an important article by L. F. Powell, entitled "An Addition to the Canon of Johnson's Writings." Here Powell presents conclusive evidence that the Preface to the little known first Index to the Gentleman's Magazine was for the most part written by Dr. Johnson.

This Index to the first twenty volumes of the magazine, published in 1753, seems to be a very rare book. In fact, Powell writes in a footnote: "There is a copy in the British Museum. The only other copy known to me is my own. American friends and correspondents have failed to find a copy in the great libraries of the United States."

Spurred on by this challenge, your editor made a thorough search of the Lehigh University Library. What was his delight and chagrin to find a copy of the 1753 Index on our shelves! He was overjoyed to find that Lehigh had a copy of such a rare book, but embarrassed to think that the information had not been sent to Powell in time to correct the footnote just quoted.

And so won't each of our subscribers institute a careful search of his own local library to see if any other copies are in this country? There is no intention of trying to prove Powell wrong, or of bragging about American holdings, but it would seem to be worth while to compile a census of existing copies of this little known Johnsonian first edition. The exact title is: A General Index to the first Twenty Volumes of the Gentleman's Magazine, published in 1753.

MEMBERS IN SERVICE

Phil Gove is now stationed at the Naval Air Station in Seattle, Washington, where he is on the staff of Admiral Wood.

Ned McAdam's new address is USNFFS, Wooster, Ohio.

W.M. Crittenden, Lieut., U.S.N.R., is now stationed at the Pre-Flight School, St. Mary's College, Calif. He writes: "The last two issues of the News-Letter have just caught up with me. It's almost unbelievably good to get the breath of good clean 18th century air...."

"I find myself giving instructions in the Essentials of Naval Service -- a far cry from Swift, Pope, Johnson. This makes the News-Letter take on an added interest."

Gale Noyes may be reached at 3509 M Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

A. B. Shepperson, formerly of the Univ. of Virginia, and author of the recent book John Paradise and Lucy Ludwell of London and Williamsburg, is now a lieutenant in the Naval Reserve and stationed overseas in the Pacific. His address is Care of the Commander, Seventh Fleet, Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, Calif.

The Paradises, by the way, were good friends of Dr. Johnson; and you may remember that in our June, 1941, issue we told about the famous dining room table, at which so many of the Johnson circle sat. It is now in Lexington, Virginia.

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A BURNS VOLUME

Of importance to all students of Burns is a little volume just published by the North Carolina Press. This is Robert Burns His Associa-

tes and Contemporaries, edited by Robert T. Fitzhugh, who is now a lieutenant in the Naval Reserve.

The Train, Grierson, Young, and Hope manuscripts, which give much valuable contemporary evidence about Burns and his friends are here printed for the first time with modern scholarly accuracy and completeness. Included also is the complete Journal of the Border Tour edited by DeLancey Ferguson (W.R.).

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A QUERY

Ralph S. Walker of the Dept. of English Literature in Kings College, Aberdeen, Scotland, is editing the papers of James Beattie, many of which have lain unpublished for many years in the Aberdeen Univ. Library. Recently he wrote to your editor asking help in the identification of various persons mentioned in Beattie's diary. Since so far no very satisfactory answers have been sent back to Walker, we pass on some of his queries and hope you can supply the desired information.

He writes: "Another familiar figure in London literary and fashionable circles was a certain Miss Cooper who seems to have been wealthy, charitable and well-known to the Montagu-Thrale set. Nobody ever seems to say much about her because everybody seems to have known her so well. Beattie saw a great deal of her in London in 1773 and I am most anxious to find out a little about her -- as, for instance, her own Christian name, her father's name and if possible her dates of birth and death...."

"Other Londoners who have stumped me are a Miss Hall, who was staying with Mrs. Montagu in 1773 ...and Mrs. John Pitt, whose maiden name I cannot discover." One other identification he is anxious to secure is of a Mrs. Wright, who was famous as an embroidress and executed portraits in needlework.

If any of our readers can help in any way with these problems, send the information direct to Walker in Aberdeen.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND

E. S. de Beer writes: "I have very little news for you of people over here. Intellectual endeavour goes on as best it can; many people begin to be aware of their need of it -- become consciously aware; so that good lectures are likely to be well attended. The position of books and reading is difficult: if one hears of a new book likely to interest one, one goes immediately to the bookseller; otherwise it may disappear for months if not forever."

"I bought a copy of Tillyard's Elizabethan World-Picture easily enough; when I wanted a second copy as a present for someone I found it only in the seventh bookshop. There is very little new publication; and older books are sometimes very difficult to come by."

A. L. Reade writes from Blundellsands, Liverpool: "I always read the Johnsonian News Letter with great interest, and it helps to keep one in touch with all the various workers in our field throughout the world."

"I have always wanted some one to imagine an interview between Johnson and Boswell in the realms of paradise, illustrating their reactions to an article by a modern writer contending that Boswell was really the greater genius of the two. What would Johnson's outraged surprise be at such a contention, and how would Boswell steer between the expression of gratified vanity and his exaggerated veneration for the Sage? It seems to me to provide the material for a brilliant bit of comedy."

What about it, you creative writers? Will someone produce a dialogue on Reade's theme?

Reade adds: "We had Powell here for a week last month, our first visitor during the war. He retired to Oxford licking the blisters on his feet, but otherwise sound in mind and body." Considering the fact that Reade's idea of a pleasant day's stroll would be twenty-five or thirty miles, we may not

wonder at Powell's limping extremities, but just the same, we wish we had been in the party for some Johnsonian gloomings.

O.D. Savage, the Hon. Secretary of the Johnson Society of London, has offered to send us some information about one of London's oldest groups -- the Antient Society of Coggers. How many of our readers know anything about this institution? The name comes from "Cogito, ergo sum" -- I think, therefore I am -- of Descartes.

According to Savage, it is probably the oldest political debating society in the world. Ever since its foundation in the mid seventeenth-fifties the Coggers have met in a London tavern every Saturday night to debate the events (news) of the week -- until the heavy bombing of the metropolis. Nowadays the meetings are twice monthly. On October 2 was held the Annual General Meeting, which is almost the 190th.

There is a tradition that both Dr. Johnson and Dickens attended the Coggers, though as with so many similar legends, there is no supporting documentary evidence. We will look forward to hearing more about the 18th century history of this interesting organization, from one of its 20th century members.

THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

An ambitious program of meetings has been arranged for the Johnson Society of London. The meetings are held each month in the Parish House of St. Clement Denes Church, Portugal St., behind the Stoll Theatre in the Kingsway.

On November 13 the topic was "Edward Gibbon and His Masterpiece" with Mr. W. H. Graham, Chairman of Committee. On December 11 the members will meet at noon at Westminster Abbey, where a wreath will be laid on the grave of Dr. Johnson.

For the coming year the program will be as follows: Jan. 22 -- "The Tragedy of Douglas", illustrated by

scenes in a model theatre. Mr. Fred-
erick Nixon of the British Puppet
and Model Theatre Guild will have
charge. Feb. 19 -- "A Johnsonian
Scrapbook", conducted by Rev. Ron-
ald Park. March 18 -- A talk by
Miss Henrietta Taylor on a Jacobite
subject. April 22 -- "Richard Sav-
age" by Mr. Edmund Nicholls, Hon.
Secretary of the Antient Society of
Cogers.

BOOKWORMS

One of Dick Altick's friends in
England (A. Culpin of 223 Pensby
Rd., Barnston, Winal, Chester)
writes an interesting query about
bookworms. Though not strictly an
18th century problem, it may be
worth passing on.

Culpin begins: "I have been un-
packing some boxes of books which
I packed hurriedly during the blitz
of 1941. Since I wrote I have made
an interesting discovery, namely,
that, contrary to general belief,
our old friend (or rather enemy)
the bookworm does attack modern
books, and even modern newspapers."

Included among the volumes which
Culpin had put away were The Times
History of the War (1914-18), bound
in half leather, and C.R.W. Nevin-
son's War Paintings, quarto in
boards with a spongy paper dust-
cover. These with others were plac-
ed in an old wooden case, originally
a container of "Plug" tobacco from
Virginia, which Culpin had had since
about 1920. In packing he had lined
the case with a sheet or two of the
current Times newspaper. The bottom
of the case is now riddled with
wormholes, as is the paper lining
and some of the books, "one having
16 perfectly circular holes each
about 1/16" deep."

Culpin continues: "All the auth-
orities assure us that bookworms
will not attack modern books, e.g.
W. Blades' The Enemies of Books,
p. 83, but perhaps the American
variety is tougher than ours! ...

"I wonder if you have ever ex-
perienced any trouble of this sort
over there and whether you can id-

entify the culprits? Are they the
true Anobium or some kind of Vir-
ginia wood-borer? I have spoken to
several bookseller friends and
shown them this perforated Times
and they are all surprised and in-
terested. An old established firm
(Young's of Liverpool) have only
come across one active bookworm in
the 100 years or so of their exis-
tence, and that was in an old il-
luminated book that had once be-
longed to one of the Popes. I've
several 18th century books with
worm holes, but obviously the per-
petrators of those died long ago.
In any case, these old books have
been nowhere near the Times His-
tories.

"Evidently the Times is more pal-
atable than many people think."

Can any of our readers supply
the answer to Culpin's problem?
The section "How the Bookworm Dis-
covered America" in the second vol-
ume of Holbrook Jackson's Anatomy
of Bibliomania does not seem to
give an explanation.

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A GOOD SUGGESTION

Rudolf Kirk (Rutgers) proposes that
the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Cen-
tury News Letters might well serve
as "little collecting dishes for
such scholarly projects as allus-
ions." Specifically, he suggests
that the Seventeenth Century News-
Letter collect Donne or Dryden al-
lusions, and we those referring to
Dr. Johnson. In this way we could
gather items from a wide scholarly
public, and someday bring out a
valuable book.

Does any of our readers feel
interested enough in the proposal
to send in some sample entries?
Perhaps in your reading you have
come across references to Johnson
in works not generally associated
with the Johnson field. If so, jot
them down and send on to us.

THE CRYPT OF ST. CLEMENT DANES

The following account of the re-opening of the long hidden crypt of Dr. Johnson's old church, as related by Mr. E. Alexander Young, has been sent to us from England:

"There was, indeed, no 'discovery' for we of the Parish Council knew of our Crypt, but no more. After nearly one hundred years, none had the least idea of either its position or its approach. I myself had inferred that the Crypt was only under the Western half of the Church, largely on account of an irregular settlement of the Church floor, due to the recent rains disturbing the sub-soil. We knew also that it was enclosed with very thick walls and heavily vaulted, and, as it had been much used, must have had a proper and easy approach. But of the latter there was neither sign nor, in my time, tradition--and I have known the Church intimately since 1884 (in which year I started making measured drawings of the W. Front and steeple).

"Such was the position in May 1941 when, after the lamentable Air Raids and Fire, the District Surveyor advised immediate 'Safety' works, a temporary roof to protect the building from the weather, and further, that we should get some definite idea of our Crypt and foundations.

"We then appointed Mr. Forsyth, F.R.I.B.A., as our Architect with myself assisting, for I had been Honorary Surveyor for many years. And it was, that on comparing with him such various old plans as were procurable, I observed an indication of steps on the N. side of the Entrance Porch. At this spot I had been familiar for years with an inscribed marble stone dated--- and marking the resting place of ---- but I at once suspected that it had been brought in for the very purpose of sealing the steps. On my reporting to our Church Authority, it left to us to find or make a way into the Crypt.

"On the morning of August 7, 1942, Mr. Sharp, our builder, set his men to work and we dug a hole in the center of the Church, where

I thought that we might find the Eastern wall of the Crypt, and soon found the back of the wall and the top of the vaulting. So far so good. In the meantime, after nearly two hours work, the heavy slab was loosened and raised disclosing solid earth only below; some digging and probing, however, soon uncovered the back or top of a long brick vault. It looked, indeed like the cover of the grave so long believed by us to be there, but on passing a rod through a quickly formed hole, it soon rang true on a stone step just below, and we knew that our quest was at an end.

"About an hour later, after testing for gas, our Carpenter who was the first to descend, reported 'A large place, all arches everywhere.' A little later on I went down with him myself, accompanied by Mr. Hawkins, our Verger. There would appear to be ample ventilation, but our candles only served to blacken the darkness.

"The Crypt we found extended under half the Church and below the two Vestries. It had been approached by steps on both sides. The roof is of groined vaulting carried on brick piers and stone columns. It is very massive, yet the columns, standing under the Nave, in rows of three, seem to give the Crypt an architectural value. The floor I could not see as it was covered with a layer of earth (probably containing human remains).

"An Act was passed in 1851, prohibiting burials in Urban areas. Shortly after this the Overseers made a general clearance of the Cells and their contents. The best of the coffins were re-enclosed in a newly formed chamber, and all else uniformly spread to a depth of 30 inches in a layer over the floor, at the same time always closely packed with earth, and covered with quick lime, thus leaving all seemly, as we find it today.

"The publishing of the news brought many letters; one advising us of an account of the existence of yet another Crypt at the E. end of the Church--'The Rector's Vault' This is not yet found."

AUCTION SALES

The following are culled from the press releases of the Parke-Bernet Galleries in New York, sent to your editor through the kindness of Arthur Swann.

Part III of the Alexander Biddle Papers was sold on November 16 and 17. Included in the sale were many important Revolutionary manuscripts -- letters by Jefferson, John Adams Franklin, Benjamin Rush -- an important address by Tom Paine; and Jonathan Williams' journal of his trip to England and the Continent. This was one of the most important American historical sales in some years.

On November 23 and 24 were sold numerous first editions and rare books from various collections. Of chief interest to us was one of the extremely rare early copies of William Blake's Songs of Innocence, with the complete series of plates, and said to have been presented by Blake to his physician. There was also a presentation copy from Dr. Johnson to Boswell of Christopori Cellarii. (so listed)

The final part of the Alfred C. Meyer collection from Chicago was sold on November 30 and December 1. Among the many autograph letters, largely American, was a letter by the elder Pitt, written in 1772 when he was striving to bring about a peaceful solution of the difficulties between the colonies and the British government.

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THE END OF A WAR

From various recent remarks, it seems obvious that many of our readers are growing as tired of the so-called "Hyphen War" as of the world conflict. One correspondent even goes so far as to suggest that if we have no more important matters to discuss, the name of this sheet should be changed to Trivia. Others have laughingly insisted that, as a way to stop the controversy, we merely alternate "News Letter" with "News-Letter", using the hyphen every other issue.

We really do mean to stop our burlesque war, if we can't the other, but out of fairness to Rudolf Kirk we must let him have his final say. He writes that he feels embarrassed at the space already devoted to his innocent query, but adds: "You have practically challenged me, however, to come out with some more evidence by observing that 'Kirk. . . has refused to put up a very strenuous fight.'" He then lists an impressive number of hyphenated titles from Crane and Kaye's Census and from Stanley Morison's The English Newspaper. Certainly we must admit that he has much good authority on his side.

In conclusion, nevertheless, Kirk remarks: "A Johnsonian News Letter is now such an established tradition that I should not like the title tampered with by enthusiasts."

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A MODERN MINIATURE OF MRS. THRALE

One of the most ardent Johnsonians in this country, whom, alas! we have never met personally, is Dr. Peter Pinceo Chaso of Providence, R.I. As an addition to a charming room given over to 18th century prints and books, he has had a beautiful miniature of Mrs. Thrale especially painted by a well-known artist, Mrs. Patty Day.

We say beautiful without hesitation, for though we have not seen the original, we have in our possession an excellent color photograph. Not that Mrs. Thrale herself has been glamorized; nature did not intend her as a "pin-up girl." But the coloring of face and dress in the miniature is very well done, and as accurate as references in the lady's diaries and the extant portraits will allow.

We are sure that Dr. Chaso would be delighted to show his treasure to any Johnsonians who chance to be in the neighborhood.